

5 March 1986

SUBJECT: Response to your question concerning the French election

As of two weeks before the French legislative election, the best evidence suggests that a conservative landslide is remote--likely only if a catastrophe should befall the Mitterrand government. While we believe the conservative coalition will win a majority, the margin will probably be slim and will require the conservative-dominated government to make significant compromises with the still-sitting and still-powerful Socialist president. [redacted]

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If, however, the conservatives secure a massive mandate from the voters, three results are likely:

- Paris mayor Jacques Chirac, who leads the strongest, most disciplined party in the conservative alliance and who is already a frontrunner, would almost certainly become prime minister, [redacted]

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- Chirac and the new majority would use their dominant constitutional powers and strong popular support to formulate and direct policy--including foreign and defense affairs.

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[redacted] Most important, Chirac would appoint his own foreign minister and would be the force to reckon with in French-US relations.

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- Mitterrand would give, but not break. He would probably remain as president, hoping to exploit any government failures or possible frictions between parties in the conservative coalition to the advantage of Socialists, who still hope to retain the presidency in 1988. [redacted]

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